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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses mobile libraries in Thailand. Topics addressed include: (1) justification for the mobile library project; (2) the different types of mobile library services (i.e., mobile train, bus, and boat libraries), including the objectives of each type of library; (3) how the mobile services were formed; (4) the uniqueness of mobile services; (5) planning the service for target groups; and (5) approaches to user education through mobile services. (MES)

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Telling the mobile libraries story: collecting the past to build a future

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Abstract

Informal education plays a crucial role for life-long education promotion. However, all activities carried out recently by the government have not been distinctively fruitful because learners have not yet been encouraged to develop and practice learning by themselves even though this is regarded as the core of education. Hence, we must encourage learners to learn practical terms by letting them assimilate their knowledge with real life situations. This will assist learners in finding proper ways to learn by themselves, analyze and understand problems they confront, and get in touch with direct experiences generating new models of learning.
It is necessary to develop the models of service for reading promotion, obtaining information, and self-learning for people through various methods suitable to the target groups. Available resources must be utilized in the uttermost for true learning. Various types of mobile libraries such as the train library, bus library, and floating library provide another model of informal education activity, which can increase the learning opportunity of Thai people.

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Paper

The Ministry of Education in the present government has a concrete policy to develop education in such a way that students have virtues and abilities to learn

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through their entire lives in a happy manner by themselves. This viewpoint is consistent with the principle of the 1997 Constitution of the Thai Kingdom, which is regarded as a step toward significant educational reengineering of our country. In responding to this plan, one of the duties of the Department of Non-Formal Education I am currently representing is to find a way to allocate our limited resources in order to create informal education activities that can access the largest number of people we possibly can. Building different styles of mobile libraries seems to be our best answer at this time for many reasons.

This paper will be include:

1. justification for the mobile library project;
2. different types of mobile library services;
3. how the mobile services were formed;
4. uniqueness of mobile services;
5. planning the service for target groups;
6. approaches to user education through mobile services.

Justification of mobile library project

Informal education plays a crucial role for life-long education promotion. However, all activities carried out recently by the government have not been distinctively fruitful because learners have not yet been encouraged to develop and practice learning by themselves even though this is regarded as the core of education. Hence, we must encourage learners to learn practical terms by letting them assimilate their knowledge with real life situations. This will assist learners in finding proper ways to learn by themselves, analyze and understand problems they confront, and get in touch with direct experiences generating new models of learning.

Quite a number of Thai people still lack educational opportunities to attend format schooling systems even though the government sectors have made a lot of efforts to conduct education programs in various ways to assist all people throughout the country as much as they can. However, self-learning is likely for people even in remote areas if they are eager to learn. In addition, we cannot deny that most Thai people still lack reading habits. That is, since childhood they have neither been encouraged nor trained to read and search for knowledge by themselves. All of these factors inevitably obstruct learning development to reach high educational goals. Implementing the mobile service plan results in solving national problems like economic crisis, which our country is confronted with.

It is necessary to develop the models of service for reading promotion, obtaining information, and self-learning for people through various methods suitable to the target groups. Available resources must be utilized in the uttermost for true learning. Various types of mobile libraries such as the train library, bus library, and floating library provide another model of informal education activity, which can increase the learning opportunity of Thai people.

Mobile Train Library

Unused train compartments still in good condition are decorated as mobile

libraries and learning centers which resemble library vans. There are various learning resources available in the compartments such as books, audio-visual aids, exhibitions, learning groups, and reading promotion activities. In the beginning, two mobile train libraries were launched in the northern and northeastern routes. Today, another southern route has been increased. Each mobile train library compartment connected with a large train is parked at a target railway station to serve people living along both sides of the rails for one to two days. Then it keeps on moving to the next railway station until it returns to the same route. There are two volunteers teachers on duty for each time with the cooperation and support from provincial and district non-formal education centers in the vicinity.

Not only all commuters of Railway Authority of Thailand at platforms and on the trains can benefit from mobile train library. This service also has great benefits, especially for homeless children. Mobile train library seems to be their second home. We have policemen-teachers on duty to guide them with social rules and other necessary knowledge. We have heard favorable result from many media sources such as Education Evolution Magazine, Piyawat, 16, said, "I ran away from home eight years ago. Teachers in here are really kind. I have opportunity to study from Non-Formal Education. I am studying hard. I like to study English. In the future, I love to be a tour guide." Some of the homeless children returned to their homes. In some cases, children's homes are too miserable, so they are better off getting help from this type of education. Mobile train libraries provide them with enough technical knowledge to survive in a society.

Objectives

1. To thoroughly expand learning opportunities and create reading habits in people of all walks of life.

2. To promote spending time during train trips in a useful and enjoyable manner by reading various kind of books in the train library.

3. To originate a new learning model which creates proper atmospheres and surroundings which respond to the needs of target groups.

Mobile Bus Library

Mobile bus libraries also play a major role in creating and developing learning skills in children, youths, and the public by providing numerous types of learning materials such as printed, artificial, and exhibition materials, textbooks, non-formal education learning packages and electronic materials to community people. This is particularly useful to those living in slum areas and to less developed communities in Bangkok. Moreover, the mobile bus libraries can assist people to keep pace with today's necessarily fundamental knowledge. This includes family, education, health, democracy, environmental education, daily life basic laws and entertainment news. Several types of learning activities are organized in the mobile bus library to facilitate this as well.

We supply teaching and learning materials for decorating each of the five commuter buses suitably for its specific target groups. Buses numbers one and two are decorated for serving children, youths and the general public living in slum areas, in construction sites and in other foundations. Buses numbers three and four are decorated for serving non-formal education learners at their group

meeting places (e.g. schools, temples, firms, enterprises, etc.) Bus number five is decorated for serving the general public in parks. Each of the bus services run five days a week from Tuesday to Sunday, except holidays. People can rent a book for seven to twenty days.

Objectives

1. To organize learning activities and encourage children, youths and the general public to acquire knowledge from various types of learning materials.

2. To upgrade the quality of life for disadvantaged children, youths and people in slum areas, in small enterprises, and in construction sites within Bangkok.

Mobile Boat Library

Mobile boat libraries can provide learning activities for people living on both river banks with numerous types of learning materials available in the mobile floating libraries. They can also learn from direct experiences by contacting with real situations that take place in main rivers such as the Chao Phraya. This helps learners gain common sense toward the environment, conservation, love, and being proud of the river civilizations which influence their lives, so that they eagerly take part in the conservation and rehabilitation of water natural resources and environments.

Mobile boat library served at least 30,000 people annually during, at least, five days a week. Two different models of services are provided in the boat on separate floors: mobile floating library and mobile floating learning center. First, mobile floating library serves as a general public library where users can read, apply for library membership, and borrow books to read outside the library for ten to twenty days. The mobile floating library provides library services for people in the boat and on land at some appropriate places such as temples, community areas, etc. Second, mobile floating learning center are conducted as a "floating classroom" for a short course of four to six hours. The topics conducted on a floating classroom will be classes such as the water civilizations, problems of water environments, conservation of water resources, environmental conservation volunteers, and guides and rivers tours.

Objectives

1. Expand services on reading, promotion activities, and learning from various types of materials for people living near by rivers to render services convenient and thorough.

2. Conduct learning experiences from real life situations concerning the civilization of rivers and water environments to people of all walks of life in order to make them aware of imminent problems and take part in the conservation of natural resources.

How the mobile services was formed?

Without the cooperative of government, private, local organizations, and communities, the mobile services would not be possible. We received much financial support from every involved group which aimed to promote life-long education for people, especially for those underprivileged groups. With this purpose, the necessary resources needed for building mobile services was distributed from all sectors.

The Department of Non-Formal Education has invited private sectors, companies, and the general people, as well as those who would like to have participation in promotion and supporting reading habits of children, youths, and people, to donate educational equipment including, bookshelves, television sets, video, and audio tape recorders, computers, etc. Books and printed materials have been contributed from various organizations such as the Office of the Narcotics Control Board, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperative, and Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare. The Railway State Authority of Thailand has given two unused trains. The Bangkok Mass Transit Authority distributed seven good condition commuter buses, which are not yet in use. The Thai Transportation has supplied two good condition boats. Moreover, other sectors, such as educational institutions, private organizations, temples, and communities, put together their efforts for planning service schedules, which has become a significant contribution to mobile services.

Unique of mobile services

Each of mobile services has its own ability to access different target groups. All of the mobile services serve as both library and learning centers. Mobile bus library can serve people in parks and congested areas. People who have more access to the platform can use mobile train libraries while people who have more access to the river can use mobile boat libraries. While each of the mobile services can reach different groups of people, there is plenty uniqueness within all mobile services.

The uniqueness of mobile services is distributing channel, economical, promotional, and political attitude. We have to accept that right now it is impossible for Thailand to build a library in every district because we have such a limited budget. Mobile services are a great help to distribution our resources. Previously, some people in each province have had to commute a couple hours to use a book. People now can save more time because mobile libraries service directly to their living area. Thus, it is more convenience for them to find learning resources. Mobile services are also economical in many ways, time, money, people, and materials. The government do not need to invest all of the money to build a library on particular location. Instead, we can receive the support of buses, trains, boats, and learning materials from the private sector, government, or organizations for mobile libraries. We then have more money to develop the country in other ways. There were volunteers to cooperate on the project in every social level. A little help from everybody makes mobile service become a reality.

Another unique feature of mobile service is that the mobile libraries become their own promotion channels. Even though media in Thailand paid attention to our mobile services, each of the mobile libraries can function as their own advertising medium. The outside decoration on the trains, buses and boats communicate with the colorful pictures and the reading campaign. The design varies depending on the place and the purpose of each mobile library. The mobile libraries catch people's eyes as they go along. Many people get to know

the service just because they see it more often. Another unique feature of mobile services is that they build in Thai people good a political attitude towards the government. Mobile services are another means of showing the concern of the government for people's learning opportunities. At least people know that we are trying to help them.

Planning the service for target groups

Different people have different needs and motivations to learn. We need to design our mobile library services to be as feasible as we can. An initiative plan of mobile services began with conducting research to identify the needs of target groups and prioritize them. Our target groups consisted of a variety of social groups. Some are the middle class, some are the poor, and some are the homeless. We simply observed, and then asked them what kind of information they would need to make their living conditions better. There are two factors in the need analysis. One is to analyze contents of learning material provided in particular mobile libraries. Another is to analyzed type of learning methods given to different groups of people.

The above analysis helps helped us to determined the complexity level of topics or contents that could be provided in each mobile library. The books, electronic materials, educational toys, and exhibitions serve specific target groups. For instance, mobile libraries that service general public living in slum areas will include books creating intelligence and various skills for children, video presentations on general documentaries, and toys such as games, jigsaws, or exhibitions on AIDs and drugs. The mobile libraries that service around schools, temples, or firms will include non-formal education learning packages, supplementary books of various subjects, and the CAI packages which enable learners to test their own knowledge by themselves. The topics included in mobile libraries that serve the general public in parks will emphasize health, exercise, mediation, etc. From our evaluation most of our target groups will be able to conveniently find basic learning within our mobile services.

From the need analysis, we concluded that the volunteers and instructors in mobile libraries must have a good "service mind." We conducted training to help volunteers understand psychological factors that make up their target group. For example, people behave differently. Instructors might need to explain materials repeatedly and patiently in case the user has received a less formal education. Some of the homeless children may act impolitely, or they may be rude; however, volunteers and instructors need to understand them and help them. After the researching process, we were ready for project implementation. We also cooperated with concerned organizations and institutions about the work plan. We have successfully set schedules to service the target groups. The mobile libraries will service at the best place and time for each target group. For instance, the mobile bus libraries are schedule to park at congest areas on the weekends, at school after 3:00pm on the weekdays, and at temple in the morning.

We publicized the project broadly in communities where projects were launched. As we trained our staff, prepared the locations, decorated mobile libraries, coordinated all involved groups, and advertised the service to the community, the project was ready to implement. The result of the project was astounding. We found the unity and cooperation of the government, organizations, students, communities, etc. made the project successful. Evaluations were conducted approximately every six months to improve our services.

Approaches to user education through mobile services.

As I have mentioned earlier, we manipulated teaching methods for each mobile service according to types of service and our target group. Mobile libraries were planned to improve non-formal education for general public, underprivileged children, and communities. We provided sufficient knowledge that they need to use in everyday life through all the mobile services.

Each of the mobile libraries was designed for both regular library and learning centers. For the library function, the fundamental books included in each mobile library usually were about short stories, exercise, health, religion, family, cooking, or occupations. We provided the public with printed and electronic materials by getting financial support from the government budget and initiating a books and learning materials donation program to receive aid from general people, firms, private sectors, and publishing houses for services in the libraries. As a result, the membership fee is absolutely affordable-five bath fee for people under fifteen, and ten bath fee for people over fifteen. However, underprivileged children and needy people do not have to pay the fee to use the services.

Learning centers in mobile services included sound labs, video programs, computers, CAI CD-ROM, and Internet. A course of four to six hours can be conducted upon request. Topics involve direct experiences that take place either around the railroad, street, or rivers. Land and water civilizations, conservation of water resources, or guide and river tours are common themes. Certificates are provided for students at the end of each section.

We emphasize a friendly atmosphere. We want the users to have fun as well as gain education. Our decoration is colorful and attractive. Staff are polite and helpful. We need to create this positive attitude for reading habits, since the users are expecting to be able to apply knowledge gained from reading as a fundamental to analyzing various matters reasonably.

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